



Bernalillo County Office of Environmental Health

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How does the Wastewater Ordinance Affect Me?

This article is written to address the concerns of the residents of Bernalillo County regarding the wastewater ordinance that was passed in 2000.

If your system is functioning, you have until January 1, 2015 to comply with the revised ordinance. However, if you modify or replace your wastewater system, or sell your home you must comply with the new ordinance at that time. The important thing to consider with existing systems is whether your system is functioning or not. Because of the rural nature of the East Mountain area, the majority of wastewater systems are septic systems. As of February 15, 2005 there were 4,775 approved wastewater permits in the East Mountain area. There are also a large number of existing unpermitted wastewater systems. The Bernalillo County Office of Environmental Health estimates this number to be in the hundreds.

The wastewater ordinance that was approved in 2000 states that you must have a management plan to assure proper operation, maintenance, and monitoring activities. Certified wastewater system evaluators, or the Bernalillo County Office of Environmental Health can help you with a management plan.

The ordinance also requires that an effluent filter be installed if you don't already have one. This effluent filter generally costs \$100 plus labor. In addition, some older systems have a concrete

inlet to the tank which will need a PVC pipe insert to attach to the effluent filter. The section of the wastewater ordinance that explains these requirements is 42.492 B. You can find a copy of the ordinance at bernco.gov or by visiting the Bernalillo County Office of Environmental Health at 111 Union Square SE, Suite 300.

If you feel that your system may not be functioning properly, contact a certified wastewater system evaluator or call the Bernalillo County Office of Environmental Health at (505) 314-0333.

The following are some frequently asked questions with answers.

Q. Do I have a septic tank permit?

A. To determine if you have a permit for your septic system, call the Bernalillo County Office of Environmental Health at (505) 314-0310

Q. What size is my septic tank?

A. To determine the size of your septic tank, have a certified wastewater system evaluator come to your property to pump the tank and determine size.

Q. What do I have to do to my septic system when I sell my home?

A. You will have to make sure your septic system is functioning properly by contacting a certified wastewater system evaluator to evaluate the system.

Q. Where is my septic tank and disposal field located?

A. A certified wastewater system evaluator can locate it. Once located, you should make a map of your lot and the location of the septic system.

Q. What is the minimum lot size for a traditional septic system?

A. This is determined by the size of your home. For example, the minimum lot size for a three-bedroom house is 0.75 acres.

Q. How do we retrofit our functioning system to comply with the new ordinance?

A. You need to have a certified wastewater system evaluator come to your house and determine if a retrofit is required. However, if your system is functioning correctly, you may only need to add an effluent filter (\$100) plus labor by 2015. Also, if you sell your home prior to 2015 you need to have an effluent filter.

Q. Do septic system maintenance companies have to be licensed by the state? How do I know if they do an adequate job?

A. The septic system maintenance company should be licensed with the state. It is always a good idea to check on references.

Q. When I buy a piece of property how will I know in advance if I will need an alternative system?

A. There must be enough space for a proper disposal field. If there is a lot of bedrock on your property, wastewater absorption may not occur properly. Call the Bernalillo County Office of Environmental Health, and inform them about your particular piece of property, and they can refer you to a site evaluator.

Q. How often should I have my tank pumped?

A. Generally, every one to three years. However, there is a table available from the Bernalillo County, Office of Environmental Health that has more specific pumping guidelines.

Q. Water softener companies tell me that it is not harmful to drain the backwash into my tank, who should I believe, the County or the company?

A. The water softener effluent can kill off the helpful bacteria in your tank. You need these bacteria for your septic system to function properly. You can drain your water softener effluent into the drain field by bypassing the septic tank.

Q. Should I use additives in my septic tank?

A. Additives should not be necessary. Your septic tank functions by breaking down waste with bacteria that naturally exist in the waste you put in your septic system. The bacteria in the additives are no more effective than the bacteria you introduce into your system every day. It is essential not to introduce harsh chemicals into your septic system because they kill off these helpful bacteria.

Q. Does the state or County provide any financial assistance if I need to change my failed system to a more expensive, alternative one?

A. The County has a program called PIPE that provides financial assistance for moderate and low-income households to connect to a sewer system or repair septic systems. You can find out more about PIPE by calling (505) 848-1500.

If you have any further questions, please contact the Bernalillo County, Office of Environmental Health at (505) 314-0310.